DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 998 FL 019 575

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TITLE A Commercial Spanish Sequence at the Post-Secondary Level: Objectives, Curriculum, and Resources.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 6p.; In: "Perspectives on Proficiency: Curriculum & Instruction. Dimension: Language '84-'85." (see FL 019 565). p111-115.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; Curriculum Design; Educational Objectives; Higher Education; Instructional Materials; *Language Proficiency; Program Descriptions; Program Development; Second Language Instruction; *Spanish
IDENTIFIERS *University of Southwestern Louisiana

ABSTRACT

The University of Southwestern Louisiana initiated a commercial Spanish curriculum to serve the growing number of students in the business school. Two major factors were considered: (1) most business students had only taken language classes as electives and were concerned about the career relevance of those courses, and (2) language courses had to fit into the existing degree plan. The first course offered was advertised by brochure in the business school and attracted the largest enrollment for any 300-level Spanish course in the department. The commercial language course track is coordinated with the literary track in both lower- and upper-level Spanish courses. Students are encouraged to prepare for two Madrid (Spain) chamber of commerce language examinations. Performance objectives for the courses include skills in business correspondence, document translation, report writing, and business-related discussion. Textbooks are supplemented with current business news, correspondence, and other business papers. Course focus is on language, especially aspects appropriate for commercial professions, not on commerce itself. Cultural awareness is an important element in the curriculum. A list of useful sources for commercial Spanish texts and other instructional materials is provided. (MSE)

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A Commercial Spanish Sequence at the Post-Secondary Level:

Objectives, Curriculum, and Resources

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Although enrollments at most American universities continue to increase, the distribution of students indicates a shift from the College of Arts and Humanities to the College of Business and the College of Computer Science. Since there is an indication that this trend will continue, foreign language educators at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) have initiated a curriculum that will be compatible with the career needs and interests of a growing number of present-day students.

In order to implement a commercial language program, a number of factors had to be considered. First, foreign language classes at USL, traditionally, have been made up of students fulfilling a foreign language requirement. The business students, on the other hand, usually did not have a language requirement but could enroll in language courses on an elective basis. Also, their motivations and objectives were different from those of the humanities majors, and they tended to be more concerned that course content be clearly relevant to their future careers. Second, language courses had to fit into an already existing degree plan. For instance, the USL business program dictated a 300-level number for language electives, and finally, in order to ensure support from business advisors, input from the College of Business concerning course design was crucial.

To gain exposure and to ensure sufficient enrollment for the first commercial language course, the foreign language faculty sent brochures to business faculty and also attached them to bulletin boards throughout the campus. Ultimately, the first course attracted the largest enrollment for any 300-level Spanish course in the language department at USL.

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A mini-grant eventually supplied funds for brochures, miscellaneous supplies, computer searches for source materials, duplicating services, travel money to research areas, and funds for a research assistant. Since the first commercial Spanish course was developed, enrollment has warranted the addition of three other courses.

For economic reasons, USL has established a commercial track within the Spanish degree plan so as to utilize existing courses. For example, majors in the literary track as well as those in the commercial track are able to co-study in lower division language classes, as well as in upper division literature and culture courses.

Commercial sources focus on such topics as: *Banca y bolsa, El comercio internacional, La importación, Marketing-peticiones de información y ofertas, Solicitudes de empleo, Conceptos jurídicos y derecho mercantil, Los organismos internacionales y sus objetivos, Correspondencia comercial, La empresa moderna y su funcionamiento,* and *Inflación y crisis en la economía mundial.*

Students are encouraged to prepare for two levels of the Madrid Chamber of Commerce examinations, the *Certificado de espanol* and the *Diploma.* The *Certificado* consists of a twenty-five minute oral section, which includes a dialogue with the testing official about a national current topic, questions concerning the administrative organization of a commercial firm, and in addition, commercial terminology. The written portion, which takes one hour and thirty minutes, includes dictation, a commercial letter, and ten questions about commercial administrative organizations.

The thirty-five-minute oral examination for the *Diploma* consists of a dialogue and a reading. The written portion, which requires one hour and forty-five minutes, includes a summary of selected material taken from the *Cámara de comercio* publications, the writing of a commercial document, and ten questions about commercial legislation and Spanish economy. More information is available from the Madrid Chamber of Commerce, *Cámara Oficial de Comercio e Industria de Madrid* (Huertas, 11, 28012 Madrid/España).

The performance objectives for one of the commercial courses at USL (Spanish 361) states that upon completion of the course the students will have acquired bilingual skills which, with the aid of bilingual dictionaries, will allow them to translate business correspondence and documents. (English and Spanish); write business correspondence and/or reports in Spanish or English concerning economic, political, and legal systems of Latin America and/or Spain which relate to business; and participate in discussions (reports and/or interviews) on matter of interest in their areas of business expertise in Spanish or English.

A typical lesson for Spanish 361 may include one or two oral reports, a reading on current affairs with a discussion period, an introduction to new vocabulary, a quiz over material from previous lessons, and/or a letter composition in Spanish with information provided in English (or a letter in English with information provided in Spanish). While there are no grammar lessons per se, grammatical problems are discussed as they arise, especially during letter writing and reports.

The commercial Spanish instructor supplements textbook material with current business news from *Diario Las Américas*, the Spanish newspaper from Miami and other periodicals. Also, local business people are invited to discuss the needs of industry and the advantages of foreign language proficiency for business majors.

Instructors who staff the commercial program do not teach commerce, but rather they teach language and emphasize aspects appropriate for commercial professions. Students in the new sequence are encouraged to acquire language and cultural skills that will allow them the option of an internship abroad and/or employment in a commercial area.

Since a basic objective of the undergraduate Spanish curriculum is to teach language by means of the four skills, a major concern is that commercial language courses include essential linguistic aspects. In addition to learning business vocabulary and terminology, language students need practice in the traditional areas of language development such as pronunciation, comprehension, reading, writing, speaking, and translating, as well as opportunities for vocabulary acquisition, grammatical development, and culture awareness. For example, non-native speakers profit from opportunities to improve pronunciation. Along with comprehension practice, pronunciation may be enriched by guest speakers, tapes of interviews, dialogues, radio announcements, and advertisements, all in the target language.

In addition, oral reports, panel discussions, debates, and use of the target language during class time give students more practice in oral language. Meanwhile, readings from classroom textbooks are enhanced with current newspapers and magazines published in the target language.[1]

Although translating exercises can become mundane, the regular textbook is supplemented by copies of current correspondence, documents,

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[1]Examples of newspapers are *Diario Las Americas*, Circulation Department, Box 593177, Miami, Florida, 331-59-2177; *El Pais*, Miquel Yuste 40, Madrid 17, Espana. Examples of magazines are: *Mercado*, Peru 263, 2 Piso, Buenos Aires, Argentina; *Semana*, Torre Cemica Ave., Francisco de Miranda, Apartado del Este 60983, Caracas 106, Venezuela.

and business papers from the instructor's file. Samples have been collected during trips abroad and from associates who live or work abroad.

Sensitivity to the culture or business etiquette, as it is referred to in the commercial world, is a most important aspect of the curriculum. Obviously, speaking the same language is not enough—one must also understand cultural concepts and recognize that rhetorical patterns differ accordingly. For instance, a member of an Indian culture may persuade his listeners by recounting the deeds of his ancestors and himself, thereby establishing his personal worth. His culture group puts a great deal of emphasis on the past, but to the American, one must "prove" his or her individual merits, rather than inheriting them. A member of an Arabic group develops an idea through repetition, building up for the climax, but the American expects to do so through logical reasoning. While a member of a Slavic culture arrives at the main idea by first showing what it is not, most Americans are concerned with getting right to the point, using economy of expression for effective communication. Whereas the American may prefer a "fair deal," no more no less, equality may not impress the Latin American who accepts the *mordida* (bribe) as a common practice. And so on . . .

Commercial Spanish educators at USL have found *Big Business Blunders* (David A. Ricks, 1983, Dow Jones-Irwin, Homewood, Illinois 60430) a useful publication concerning business etiquette. Other valuable resources for commercial Spanish include:

1. *Guide to Latin American Business Information Sources (*Organization of American States, General Secretarist, Department of Publication, Columbus Memorial Library, Washington D.C.).

2. *Libros de Textos y Materiales Complementarios* (South-Western Publishing Company).

3. *The Journal of Language for International Business* (American Graduate School of International Management, Thunderbird Campus, Glendale, AZ 85306).

4. The American Translators' Association (109 Croton Avenue, Ossining, NY 10562).

5. The European Exchange Consortium (Ray Schaub, Foreign Language Department, Eastern Michigan University. Ypsilanti, MI 48197).

6. The annual Conference on Languages for Business and Professions (Geoffrey Vought, Department of Foreign Languages, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197).

7. Commercial Spanish Textbooks (Editex, Rafael Calvo 18, Madrid 10, Espana).

8. Publications from Spain (Libreria Dossat; Plaza de Santa Ana 8, Apartado 47, Madrid/Espana).

9. Commercial Spanish study abroad (Estudio Internacional Sampere, Castello, 50 dcha; Madrid 1, Espana).

10. *Trabajo y vida* (Newbury House Publishers).

It is too early to objectively judge the real impact of the commercial language program at USL. However, up to this point, students and administrators have reacted positively, and Commercial Spanish students account for approximately 6.5 percent of the over-all Spanish enrollment. While some graduates of the program have enhanced their commercial language skills through study abroad, others have secured employment with firms in Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, or with international firms in the United States. On this basis, it is the opinion of the foreign language faculty at USL that the department is beginning to better address the needs of the student body as a whole than it has done in the past.